

## Woman seeking belated diploma still held to current standards

By **MOLLY WILLIAMSON**  
State Journal Staff Writer

Rexie Douglas will not be denied her high school diploma.

Though the Kentucky Board of Education Wednesday turned down a request to allow her to graduate with only 18 credits instead of the state-required 22, she said this fight is not over.

"That's not going to be the end of it," Douglas said. "It is not my fault I was misinformed and I've been done wrong."

Douglas was a half credit short of graduating in 1966. She only needed another elective but never returned to school.

In November 2004, she went back to Thorn Hill Learning Center to begin



**Rexie Douglas**

working on her last credit. She said she was told she could take anything and then graduate in May. Douglas opted for a math course.

After three months of work, she earned her half credit and was preparing for the May ceremony. She

received a letter from Franklin County Public Schools congratulating her on her accomplishment and telling her she could now graduate.

Then, in late May, a week before graduation, she called to find out where

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she needed to be and when and found out she could not receive her diploma. She had to earn the full 27 credits like other 2005 Franklin County High School graduates.

Her Thorn Hill teacher, Barry Burkett, said he understood from the Kentucky Department of Education staff that Douglas could be "grandfathered in" by the local school board.

In reality, the Franklin County school board could waive the additional five credits required, but Douglas had to meet the 22-credit state requirement, said Michael Miller, Kentucky Department of Education director of the division of curriculum, Wednesday.

Douglas also would have to take additional courses in each subject to meet the requirement including another English, another social studies and another science. Plus, she would need an arts and humanities course and some electives.

Douglas took her case to the Franklin County board Aug. 1 and it voted to ask the Kentucky Department of Education to consider waiving the typical requirements for a high school graduate and give

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—**Janna Vice**, state school board member

Douglas the credits necessary to earn a diploma.

It commended her on going back to school but said it could not legally waive the requirements. That is the state board's job.

Burkett suggested the Franklin County board award Douglas credits for life experience — working 30 years and raising a family. However, he said sometimes school districts will not award more than two credits for work outside the school.

The only way a district can grant credit for life experience is if the school has performance-based credits, which no Kentucky schools have, Miller said in June. For performance-based curricula, usually students need to take a test and do some sort of project to show off their skills in addition to their accumulated life experience, gained

through working in a co-op.

Department of Education staff recommended Wednesday not granting the waiver, because it could set a bad precedent in which numerous people would petition the state board for credit waivers.

Board chairman Keith Travis said he did not want to "open the floodgate" of waiver requests, but felt if it was wrong to deny Douglas if she did what she thought she was supposed to. He said Douglas allegedly received erroneous information from both the local and state boards and someone has to be accountable for that.

"There is just not a good answer in something like this," Travis said. "It is unfortunate."

Board member Helen Mountjoy said she regrets any miscommunication, but said the state is not offering a 1966 diploma in 2005,

it is offering a 2005 diploma and all graduates have to meet those requirements.

"I don't see any way we can step away from the standards," Mountjoy said.

Board member Janna Vice made the motion to deny Douglas' request because she said the state could not grant a 2005 diploma based on 1966 standards. However, she commended Douglas for her desire to earn her diploma.

"If we followed our hearts today, we would be taking a different action," Vice said. "But the board has to uphold the state requirements."

Bill Douglas, Rexie's husband, said he did not understand why the boards of education were so reluctant to give Douglas a diploma.

"If I ran this department (of education) and I had 5,000 people on my doorstep wanting a diploma instead of a GED, I would do anything in the world I could for them," Bill Douglas said. "The number one priority in Kentucky is to get an education. If people go the extra steps to try to get their diploma instead of a GED, I would load this whole floor with people to make sure that happened."

While it was suggested Douglas pursue a GED, she said she would not. She wants and expected to earn her diploma.